

MEXICO

Geography

Mexico is bordered by the United States to the north and Belize and Guatemala to the southeast. Mexico is about one-fifth the size of the United States. Baja California in the west is an 800-mile (1,287-km) peninsula that forms the Gulf of California. In the east are the Gulf of Mexico and the Bay of Campeche, which is formed by Mexico's other peninsula, the Yucatán. The center of Mexico is a great, high plateau, open to the north, with mountain chains on the east and west and with ocean-front lowlands beyond.



Government

Federal republic.

History

At least three great civilizations—the Mayas, the Olmecs, and the Toltecs—preceded the wealthy Aztec empire, conquered in 1519–1521 by the Spanish under Hernando Cortés. Spain ruled Mexico as part of the viceroyalty of New Spain for the next 300 years until Sept. 16, 1810, when the Mexicans first revolted. They won independence in 1821.

From 1821 to 1877, there were two emperors, several dictators, and enough presidents and provisional executives to make a new government on the average of every nine months. Mexico lost Texas (1836), and after defeat in the war with the U.S. (1846–1848), it lost the area that is now California, Nevada, and Utah, most of Arizona and New Mexico, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In 1855, the Indian patriot Benito Juárez began a series of reforms, including the disestablishment of the Catholic Church, which owned vast property. The subsequent civil war was interrupted by the French invasion of Mexico (1861) and the crowning of Maximilian of Austria as emperor (1864). He was overthrown and executed by forces under Juárez, who again became president in 1867.



Agriculture

Crop production was and continues to be the most important agricultural activity in Mexico, accounting for fully 50 percent of agricultural output. Domestically, the most important crops for consumption purposes are wheat, beans, corn, and sorghum. The most important crops for export purposes are sugar, coffee, fruits, and vegetables. Mexico continues to be one of the top producers of crops in the world. In 1999, the crops produced in greatest number in Mexico were sugar cane (46.81 billion tons), corn (15.72 billion tons), sorghum (5.59 billion tons), wheat (3 billion tons), and beans (1.04 billion tons). Fruits and vegetables are the most economically significant agricultural products exported by Mexico. For example, in 1998 Mexico's export of fruits and vegetables to the United States generated revenues of US\$2.86 billion while meat and fish exports generated US\$.71 billion, and coffee and cocoa US\$682 million.

In comparison to its crop production, livestock accounts for 30 percent of Mexico's agricultural output. In 1999, livestock or livestock products produced in greatest number were milk (8.96 billion liters), poultry (1.72 billion tons), eggs (1.63 billion tons), and beef (1.39 billion tons). Mexico is not self-sufficient in the production of meat and fish. In 1998 it imported US\$1.05 billion of meat and fish from the United States.



References

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